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THE EBON MUSE AND
OTHER POEMS ENGLISHED
BY JOHN MYERS O'HARA FROM
THE TEXT OF LÉON LAVIGNY



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THE EBON MUSE

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AND OTHER POEMS

BY

LÉON LAVIAUX

ENGLISHED

BY

JOHN MYERS O'HARA

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THE dominant note of the first volume of Léon Laviaux, the young Creole poet, is a glorification of the *fille de couleur*—a theme unique in literature. His poetry, except in so far as it pertains to an appreciation of natural beauty in the tropics, is unreservedly laudative of the dark-skinned races. This singular predilection is due, as he tells us, both to heredity and environment. He seeks to give it expression in strange and erotic songs, through whose fulgurant smoke break flashes of lyric fire. They are brief bursts of passion, like volcanic puffs, too fierce and impetuous for prolonged fervor. Even this can be noticed in the fragmentary character of "The Ebon Muse," his only attempt at sustained utterance. It would seem that the imaginative impulse, in those somnolent lands where inertia rules, was incapable of any enduring flight. This is undoubtedly the effect of climatic conditions on the mind. But Laviaux is still young. A cool whiff of more virile air, from zones alien to the eternal blue, may yet invigorate his Muse.

Then we may have something worthier than these songs that voice the ultra-emotion of youth over plastic beauty—songs that shall breathe to us, through the scent of jasmine and the lure of palm, the soul of the Creole isles.

J. M. O.

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YOU will find the colors of the flesh are even more varied and surprising than the colors of fruit. Nevertheless it is only with fruit colors that many of these skin-tints can correctly be compared. There are banana-tints, lemon-tones, orange-hues, with sometimes such mingling of ruddiness as in the pink ripening of the mango. Agreeable to the eyes the darker skins certainly are, and often very remarkable—all clear tones of bronze being represented; but the brighter tints are absolutely beautiful. There is one rare race type, totally unlike the rest; the skin has a perfectly golden tone, an exquisite metallic yellow; the eyes are long and have long silky lashes; the hair is a mass of thick, rich, glossy curls that show blue lights in the sun. What mingling of races produced this beautiful type? I do not think the term olive always indicates the color of this skin, which seemed to me exactly the tint of gold; and the hair flashes with bluish lights like the plumage of certain black birds.

Physically the fille de couleur may certainly be classed, as white Creole writers have not hesitated to class her, with the most beautiful women of the human race. She has inherited not only the finer characteristics bodily of either parent race, but something else belonging originally to neither, and created by special climatic and physical conditions — a grace, a suppleness of form, a delicacy of extremities, so that all lines described by the bending of limbs are parts of clean curves.

.
Among her class there are figures to make you dream of Atalanta—and all, whether ugly or attractive as to feature, are finely shaped as to body and limb—a type of the human thoroughbred representing the true secret of grace—economy of force.

—LAFCADIO HEARN.

*I am, by fate's decree
And my heredity,
Of soul a hedonist,
Of flesh an ebonist.*

THE EBON MUSE

THE EBON MUSE



SAW two palms, like temple columns, soar
Into the night, and under far, the shore
Encircle with its arms of sand the sea
That sighed upon its bosom drowsily ;
And all the slopes that fell in flowers to meet
The wave receding foamless at their feet,
As wide and gradual steps of purple seemed
Ascending to the summit where I dreamed ;
Above the palms that mingled crowns and made
An arch where rustling verdure overswayed,
Full-orbed, and like a splendid lamp, the moon
Hung golden in the starless dusk of June ;
The very air was odor, and the calm
Was that of love's own sleep on sea and palm ;
And on my lids and in my heart the spell
With irresistible insistence fell ;
Each drowsy sense was yielding, but before
The ways of dream had closed the final door,
Out of a sudden flash of lyric flame,
And virginal for me, the vision came !

She came for me, out of a cloud of fire,
A regal evocation of desire ;
For me, sole dreamer of a Creole isle,
Sole wooer of her world-forgotten smile ;
She came from some dim haunt of spirit-peace,
The asphodel of shadow and surcease ;
Across the sea, as o'er the Stygian stream,
Leaving the hidden shore of dusk and dream ;
I saw her dimly, gazing from afar,
As through horizon mists a sable star ;
The banished Muse, released from that malign
Decree that doomed her to her sister Nine ;
In Song's far dawn they first beheld her nude,
Abashed before a goddess ebon-hued ;
Drooping their lids, they turned from her in shame,
A being branded with almighty blame ;
Swiftly repulsing her they turned away,
Mnemosyne's white daughters of the day ;
And left her, child of chaos, with the blight
Born of the black abysses of the night.

.....
Like a bronze statue, in the softer glow,
She stood immobile, near to me, and lo !
Where well a laureled throng might bend to her,
I was alone, her poet-worshipper ;

Her lids, unlifted still, were thrall to sleep,
Sweet where the underworld is poppy-deep;
Unravished still the lips that parted mute,
Riper and moister than a luscious fruit;
One hand was raised while one was pressed to feel,
Against her heart, its passionate appeal;
The surging thrill of life in every vein,
Glowing and potent for delight and pain;
Erect and tense, lifting their pointed pride,
Inviolate her breasts in fervor vied;
Between her shoulders shone a glossy track,
The dented slope of her imperial back;
The contour of her torso seemed to me
A polished buckler of black ivory;
Her loins' curves like a lyre's whose symmetries
Dipped faultless to the dimples of the knees;
Her arms with darkling sheen were sleek and fair,
Her throat blue-shadowed where the lustrous hair
Clung as the crater's smoke that densely drifts
When the far cloud below it breaks and lifts;
And fruits and flowers, upon her burning mouth,
Bruised juice and drenched the perfume of the South;
The mystery of the heavens was in her eyes,
Creation's vast and fathomless surmise;
Elusive vision of immortal love

Falling through shadow from the dome above ;
She seemed the incarnation of the night,
The glorious antithesis of light ;
As darkness deepened all her beauty shone
Fairer than any underneath the sun ;
And leaping upward, a triumphal span
Of sudden stars from wave to zenith ran ;
The lustre of the moon, a paling power,
Lingered as for a god's own bridal hour ;
And up the purple steps she came to me,
The last between the summit and the sea.

.
She came with passion in her eyes that were
Dewy with languor, and with lips of myrrh ;
Beneath her lashes lurked volcanic fire,
Her breath was fragrance and her glance desire ;
Fervor and flame of song were in her face,
All memory of beauty in her grace ;
Promise of swift fruition and the fair
Largess of virile years to live and share ;
Fresh flowers to hide the faded ones below,
An aureole to crown the waning glow ;
Rapture for torture, smiles for futile tears,
And satiation for the pang that sears ;
Illusion upon illusion, and the arts

Of great dead lovers, earth's memorial hearts ;
All this and more my soul was conscious of,
Delirious with her beauty and her love ;
She came and stood before me, and delight
Half stifled speech and almost blinded sight ;
I dared not look, so stirred by all I felt,
But every sense was conscious that she knelt.

.
She leaned to me and laid her lips on mine,
Imperiously bending but benign ;
I drank the lyric fervor of her mouth,
The soul to sing the glamor of the South ;
High inspiration and the will to make
A vital strain to which the world would wake ;
Leaving the beaten paths of Song to blow
Strange music where a fameless people go ;
The equal glory of the night and day,
Wresting from light its long unchallenged sway ;
A hymn of racial beauty, rare and new,
The rival lure beneath the ebon hue ;
The radiance of the suns that triumph in
The finer lustre of the golden skin ;
Burnished as bronze or sable as the rise,
Velvet and deep, of moonless midnight skies.

This was the gift, my heritage, that she
Gave with the kiss whose fire is memory ;
Whose freshness is of Heliconian dews,
The consecration of the Ebon Muse.

CREOLE IDYLS

L IKE slave and slave
With mighty plumes,
Great palm trees wave
Their clustered blooms ;
Along the shores
A curving mile
Of blackamoors
In giant file.

Their trunks that show
An ebon gleam,
A shining row
Of torsos seem ;
Each crest of green
As madras wound
In silken sheen
Their brows around.

And unelate,
This pageantry
A potentate
Has made of me ;

The yellow sand
Is my divan
That perfume-fanned
I bask upon.

Red rifts above
The waves that break,
A circle of
Flamingos make;
My slaves I mark
With listless eye,
And near me dark
Sultanas lie.

DARK on the seaward dawn,
 Into the roseate fire,
The palms aspire ;

Into the void they yawn,
 Summit to summit wed,
Green-helmeted.

A FOAMING line
Of waves define
The outer bar
Of shores afar;

Beneath the beat
Of blinding heat,
The ocean's hue
Is molten blue;

Where shoreward wide
The surges ride,
Two buzzards stand
Upon the sand;

And high in air,
Against the glare,
Two others fly
And blot the sky;

Between the sun
And soar of one
Colossal palm
That lords the calm.

NOON!
Silence and heat ;
A Creole tune
On the lips of old Fadette!

Noon!
Drowsy and sweet
The *patois* croon
On the lips of old Fadette!

MYRIAD murmurs hush
A haunt of sloth,
Heavy with heat and lush
With giant growth ;

Masses of cyclic mold
Impede the way,
Pungent with scent of old
And vast decay ;

Under the leaves that dome
Profundity,
Yellow lianas roam
From tree to tree ;

Ever the endless green,
The endless shade ;
Riot of plants that screen
The forest glade ;

Brilliant with flowers that surge
From tangled strife,
Breathing creative urge
Of tropic life ;

Potence of earth elate
And savage grown,
Under the suns that sate
Its belting zone.

-

ZOMOQUÉ!

Ecstatic bird,
Sing on, thy heart to ease;
While the glad trees
Toss a white cloud of blossoms to the breeze!

Zomoqué!

I have not heard
The nightingale, but these
Mad melodies
Are more to me than songs of other seas!

THE shield a god
Might bear who trod
Along the world ;

Or disk of fire
Immortal ire
From heaven hurled ;

The sea-line's rim
Is purple dim
Beneath its glow ;

It leaves a scar
Of cinnabar,
And sinks below.

O CARIBBEAN wind !
Freshen afar and bend
The trees that are to thee
Thy twilight litany ;

Stir in their tops and send
Through palm and tamarind,
Blown from a shadowed sea,
Thy vesper prayer to me.

O VER the hill
Of stunted palms
Faint rumbles come ;

Breaking the still
Night with its calms,
The voodoo drum !

Odor of leaves,
Flowers of the vine,
Odor of flesh ;

Riot that weaves,
Bodies that shine,
Dances that mesh ;

Black satyrs steal,
Like jaguars,
On nymphs as black ;

And whirl and reel,
Beneath the stars,
Demonic ;

Powdered with dust,
Panting they writhe
In fierce embrace;

Burning with lust,
Humid and lithe
Their limbs enlace!

.

Over the hill
Of stunted palms
Faint rumbles come;

Breaking the still
Night with its calms,
The voodoo drum!

NIGHT, would that I,
God of the sky,
Heaped gems on thy dark
Bare breasts that I mark;
Mine for delight,
Amorous Night!

Night, ere we part,
Take from thy heart
One jewel to be
Cast earthward for me;
.
Swiftly a star
Falls from afar!

OF my loves there are four
That my song would endear ;
Golden Luore !
Ebon Zaire !

*And with lyric caress
Laurel each, as a queen ;
Bronze-hued Tanesse !
Amber Fafine !*

LUORE

THE orange flare
Is wide on the west, Luore!
And verdured palms in the lucent air
Tower by the shore.

The jasmine scent
Swoons heavy and sweet, Luore!
Where blossom-thick is the vine's ascent
Over the door.

Your languid eyes
Are dim with desire, Luore!
And in your heart is the heat that skies
At noon can pour.

Your body cleaves
In ardor to mine, Luore!
Close as the vine, with its fragrant leaves,
The palm upbore.

As sweet as fruit
And poignant your kiss, Luore!
Our lips, with ravishing fire, embrate
At rapture's core.

Soul of the South,
I could, O my queen, Luore!
Yield all my life on your luscious mouth
And be no more.

TWO golden doves
That fill their scented nest ;
Haunt of the Loves,
Twin treasures of her breast ;

Fairer than throat
Or shoulder garment-free,
My glances gloat
Upon their luxury.

THE sapphire tide,
Foam-fringed and inlet-wide,
Creeps to the beach ;
And the long ripples reach
Like silver lips o'erlapping each on each ;

And eager o'er
The body of Luore,
That lies supine,
They melt away as wine
Poured lavish by some lover on a shrine ;

Linger and kiss
With lips of liquid bliss
Each charm, and trace
The way of their embrace,
Until they vanish in some secret grace ;

And then, at last,
Their fluid lure is passed ;
And blithely she
Comes dripping from the sea,
And gives herself, a golden nymph, to me.

MY passion for golden flesh
Seeks a honied mesh
(Like a bird that would soar
From its nest no more)
In thy beautiful bosom, Luore!

My kisses, that flow as fire
O'er a fane, expire
(Like a flambeau of yore
At the bridal door)
In thy beautiful bosom, Luore!

ZAÏRE

OUT of thy large fruit-luscious mouth, Zaire!
As music fell,
With velvet iteration on my ear,
That syllable;

As soft as flowers that *patois* of the French
From musky lips
That slur the guttural, O comely wench,
Caressful slips;

Its murmur woos the sense with fervor of
Some drowsy wine;—
O language of the Creole isle of love,
Thou, too, art mine!

THE grace of the white and brute of the black
Were mixed in thee ;
A simian face — the slope of thy back,
Callipyge !

Dark lustre of lines that are sculpture-sleek,
The vapid leer ;
A whim for the monstrous did Nature wreak
In tall Zaire !

STRANGE frenzies fill
Thy black and shining bosom's rise and fall ;
Wild passion's primal thrill,
Its brutal rapture immolating all ;

The gust that sweeps
The unrelenting flame along the blood ;
The tidal throe that keeps
Writhing the crest of its voluptuous flood ;

The slime and fire
That overboil the crater of thy soul ;
The ruin of desire
That tears, like the tornado, to its goal.

A SORCERY

Is thine intense ;
The odor of thy bosom is to me
A potent redolence ;

Poignant yet sweet,
It breathes thy race ;
Enters my veins, a fierce and virile heat,
Burning for thy embrace.

TANESSE

THOU art fair as the palm
By the shore, in the calm
Of the night, Tanesse!

Thou art regal to me
As that loveliest tree
Of the south, Tanesse!

S LUGGISH as some palm-fringed and placid flood
Of current slow,
The hidden fervor blended in thy blood
Must ever flow ;

A tropic fire that slumbers in thy veins,
My bronze *capresse* ;
Languor of isles of indolence that reigns
In thee, Tanesse !

YOUR flesh has the scent
Of an exquisite musk,
From the amorous dusk
Of the orient ;

But the ankle-bells,
That tinkle and fret
Like a silver jet,
Are a ring of shells ;

And the madras green,
As thy crowning gem,
Is the diadem
On thy tresses seen ;

And the girdled whisk
Of a garment loose
Is the passion-noose
Of an odalisque ;

And the jasmine gates,
With their attar-jar,
Is the dim bazaar
Where thy lover waits.

UNDO the scarf that hides
Thy breast whose bronze divides
In turgent loveliness
Of hue, Tanesse!

For charms of fairer tint
Bare throat and shoulder hint;
Sleek slopes that my caress
Descends, Tanesse!

FAFINE

THY parroquets, Fafine,
With plumage green,
Doze in the mango tree ;

Only the insect-sound
Strident around ;
Life is a revery.

Broad on the sleeping town
The sun beats down ;
White the deserted street ;

Hot is the hillward noon,
My octoroon ;
Dream in the shadow, Sweet !

Curl on the woven mat
Lithe as a cat,
Lissome of limb and arm ;

Slumber will soon relax,
Supple as wax,
All of thy body's charm.

NUDE in the cool
Palm-shaded pool ;

The ripples gloat
Around your throat ;

Your amber limbs
Seem lotus stems ;

Your hair the blue
Weed's floating hue ;

Your face a far
Strange nenuphar.

.

Hot humid dusk
Of moon and musk ;

Great stars that light
The languid night ;

A couch of moss
To dream across ;

And near to me —
Oh, ecstasy !

The moon's soft sheen
On you, Fafine.

THOUGH fair, O North, thy nymphs
 And half divine ;
Colder to me the glimpse
 Than snow of thine ;

Fair with the statue's grace,
 Its frozen dream ;
Whose faultless curves no trace
 Of tint redeem ;

Thral to the law within,
 To Nature true ;
Give me the golden skin
 Or darker hue.

Futile, O lure of white,
 Thy pale appeal !
Mine is an Afric blight
 That few may feel.

MY amber dove,
My Creole queen,
O leave me not, my love!

The Northern skies
Are grey, and lean
Above a land of sighs;

And none will care
Of all, Fafine,
For beauty deemed less fair;

Their hearts are cold,
Their ways are mean,
Their only god is gold;

When you forsake
These slopes of green,
Your heart, Fafine, will break;

My southland rose,
Abide between
My arms that fold you close;

Ah, tears! they tell,
My Creole queen,
That this is not farewell!



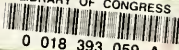
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